



**Connecticut Council of
Family Service Agencies**

Strengthening Connecticut's Families

Al Barber
Chair, Board of Directors

Daniel J. O'Connell, Ed.D.
President & CEO

**TESTIMONY OF TRACEY B. WALKER, CT COUNCIL OF FAMILY SERVICE AGENCIES
TO THE
APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
ON THE
GOVERNOR'S PROPOSED MITIGATION PLAN
WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2009**

Good afternoon Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian and other members of the Appropriations Committee. I am Tracey Walker, Director of Programs for the Connecticut Council of Family Service Agencies. The Council is the statewide network of seventeen (17) family service agencies whose mission it is to strengthen families and the communities in which they live. In accordance with this mission, the Council provides the Safety Net Services Network under contract with the Department of Social services (DSS) through the Empowering People for Success (EPS) program.

Since 1997, the Empowering People for Success program has provided home based case management and basic needs payments to Temporary Family Assistance (TFA) recipients and families no longer eligible for cash assistance to assist them in becoming self-sufficient through alleviating barriers to employment, decreasing risks to minor children, and stabilizing families. In FY 2009, Empowering People for Success served 2199 families. These families had an average of two minor children, 79% of these families were headed by single parents and 80% were racial minorities. The barriers to success and self sufficiency experienced by these families include lack of transportation, lack of child care, lack of education, debt, substance abuse, domestic violence, mental illness, medical issues, children's behavioral health issues, medically fragile children, parental cognitive limitations and language barriers.

The families served by Empowering People for Success are among the poorest in Connecticut with the least personal resources to ensure their success, yet the majority leave the program being employed or employment ready. The Council has maintained a consistent level of service over the years despite dwindling resources. The most recent history of cuts includes a loss of \$300,000 during contract negotiation with DSS in FY 2008 and \$105,045 lost through the Governor's November 2009 rescissions. In addition, another proposed \$500,000 cut from the DSS Safety Net Services line item is included in the Governor's Deficit Mitigation Plan. This represents almost \$1 million, or 33% of our total budget. Our ability to maintain services has been negatively impacted by the Governor's rescissions and will be drastically curtailed if we have to sustain the cuts recommended in the mitigation plan.

The combined impact of the Governor's rescissions and the mitigation plan will result in a 24% decrease in staffing which will translate into at least 575 fewer families served each year and

125 less families receiving rent payments, utility payments and food vouchers. The families who receive these payments generally have no income and are no longer on cash assistance. They are not eligible for other rental assistance programs as those programs require income and proof of sustainability. Without Empowering People for Success program services these families will have nowhere else to turn. They are not eligible for Care 4 Kids child care, they are not eligible for rental assistance, and they are not able to overcome their barriers to employment without assistance. This means that approximately 1150 children will be put at risk by these cuts as their parents face eviction, homelessness, untreated mental illness, domestic violence and other barriers with no supports.

The Council understands the serious challenges facing Connecticut's budget and that not all services can be held sacrosanct. However, services that meet basic human needs must be kept in place or all services will be for naught. Families cannot function successfully if there is no roof over their head, no food in their stomachs, and their children are not safe. Reduction of Safety Net Services and other basic needs services will make for much higher human and fiscal costs in the future.